

WASHINGTON, DC – Today, Rep. Pete Stark (D-CA), Ranking Democrat on the Ways and Means Health Subcommittee responded to recent statements made by senior Bush Administration officials regarding the future of Medicare.

As reported by the *Newhouse News Service* on November 6th, while negotiations continue in Congress on a prescription drug benefit, high-ranking White House officials are already discussing the fact that cutbacks to the Medicare and Social Security programs will be inevitable.

“Seniors desperately need a prescription drug benefit. But, the plan being promoted by Republican leaders today is much less about a drug benefit than it is about achieving their real goal – dismantling Medicare. By including controversial provisions that turn Medicare over to the private insurance industry and moving toward capping Medicare spending, this bill puts Medicare’s future on thin ice. I am committed to passing a drug benefit, but will not go along with this Trojan horse approach that is really intended to end Medicare as we know it,” said Rep. Stark.

The *Newhouse News Service* article cites Bush’s Secretary of Health and Human Services Tommy Thompson saying that seniors should be prepared for Medicare to pay less of their medical expenses and that “there will have to be changes in the future in order to make Medicare solid.” Tom Scully, the Bush Administration’s Director of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, adds that he thinks seniors would use less health care if they were forced to pay more for it, saying that his own mother, under the current Medicare system, “pays practically nothing when she goes to the doctor, nothing when she goes to the hospital. She’s totally free of any real sense of cost.”

“The Republican’s Medicare prescription drug proposal has the very building blocks the Administration will need to start whittling away at our nation’s commitment to assuring that Medicare provides health care to our nation’s seniors and people with disabilities,” said Stark. “The writing isn’t just on the wall, the Bush Administration is out front saying they want to see the end of Medicare as we know it.”